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Written statement* submitted by the Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 May 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Human rights situation in Eritrea

Preface

Maat Association submits this report to illustrate the observations on the human rights situation in Eritrea, which witness the interference of some states in its internal affairs, constituting an attack on the sovereignty and independence of Eritrea and a violation to principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states, as well as the negative impact of such interferences on the ability of the State to fulfil its obligations, as provided for in the law.

This intervention coincided with the slowing down of the Eritrean Government's easing of restrictions on fundamental freedoms in the country, restricting activists and opponent's politicians, restricting peaceful protests, as well as restrictions on freedom of expression, association and political parties.

External interference

External interference in Eritrean internal affairs has intensified over the recent period, threatening stability and peace in the Horn of Africa region as a whole. Some neighbouring countries have supported and financed by other governments by hosting and financing the hardlines Eritrean Islamic opposition group "Mohammed Jumma" and establishing training camps for its elements near the Eritrean border, to conduct political and military activities against the Asmara government, and the intelligence services of its own states have provided logistic training for this extremist group, financed by a Gulf state with political relations and interests with the neighbouring countries of Eritrea.

There are certain indications that Ethiopia is interfering in the internal affairs of Eritrea by supporting the Eritrean opposition parties operating from Addis Ababa and providing financial and logistical support, which threatens the stability and security of Eritrea. The Ethiopian threats are a burden on the country and its people, through increased unnecessary expenditure on the purchase of arms, instead of spending these expenditures on development and the provision of basic services.

It should be noted that the principle of non-intervention ensures that states are protected against external pressures in their various forms and, which allows for the strengthening of its stability, and thus has a positive impact on the maintenance of international peace and security.

Economic challenges

Eritrea is experiencing difficult economic conditions as a result of the country's non-war and non-peace situation since independence from Ethiopia in 1993, as Eritrea faces challenges on the reconstruction of infrastructure and the development of its agriculture-based economy, which had deteriorated due to the long periods of conflict faced with Ethiopian colonization.

Despite Eritrea's difficult economic circumstances, which require the intervention of the international community to provide aid to counter those challenges, but the government worked to achieve social justice through the provision of food security, a health system that enjoys extensive financial support, and free education to University level, infrastructure, reduction of disparities between rural/urban areas, construction of roads and dams, building of schools, health centres and hospitals in several parts of the country.

Malnutrition

Malnutrition rates increased over the past few years in many areas of Eritrea, where more than 22.000 children under five years of age suffer from acute malnutrition, and "measles" rate in Eritrea was more than 80%, leaving approximately 20% of children without protection from fatal childhood illnesses every year. National data also indicates that many areas have been affected by drought over the past few years 1 . This led to the announcement by FAO; that Eritrea is among the 37 countries in need to food aid by July 2018 2 .

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1 Eritrea to vaccinate all children under five years old against measles in national campaign, you can read more on: https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/eritrea.html

2 Conflicts and weather patterns are pressure factors on food security, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (**FAO**), 5 March 2018.http://www.fao.org/news/story/ar/item/1105143/icode/

Rights of children and women

Eritrea has made significant progress on the implementation of women's rights, having signed various international conventions related to women's rights, and there are no discriminatory laws against women, and the relevant laws provide for equal rights for women and men with regard to certain issues such as land ownership and citizenship, nationality and children's rights. The Government had also continued its policy of zero tolerance of all forms of sexual violence, and all concerned agencies had increased awareness-raising campaigns .3 The Government also issued a law to prohibit the practice of female genital mutilation, and intensive campaigns had been carried out on the subject, with penalties in cases where the courts have been informed of. The government makes an effort with regard to the rights of the child through the development of a national strategy, aimed at providing a better environment for the development of children and the empowerment of local communities to promote good practices for child care and adequate socialization, and the community program for the reintegration of orphans has expanded.

Freedom of expression and association

The Government continued to impose systematic and arbitrary restrictions on the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and circulation of information. Eritrea at the end of the list of world classification issued by "Reporters Without Borders" 4 , for its violations against journalists, and the participation of any person in the country's information may expose him to arrest or detention, as there are no political parties other than the "Popular front for democracy and justice", the governor, plus all the unions are operated by the government, not allowing for the establishment of public gatherings or non-governmental organizations, and the activities of international organizations were severely restricted. Despite the numerous shortcomings of the constitution, which contains broad powers for the president, it is frozen, in addition to freezing the work of the House of Assembly as well.

Freedom of religion and belief

The authorities have tightened restrictions on freedom of religion, where Christians are discriminated, detained for long periods without charge because of their religious beliefs. Many evangelical Christians continued to practice their religion in secret to avoid imprisonment. Patriarch Antonius, head of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, attending a mass in the capital, the last time he was publicly seen 10 years before he was sentenced to house arrest because of his objection to government interference in the affairs of the church.5

Many of the Islamic schools in the country were closed on the orders of the government authorities, in addition to the arrest "Mohamed Nur", the former director of the "Al Diaa Islamic Private School" in Akriya neighborhood last October; for failure to implement the government's orders; refusing to impose a ban on Hijab (Head Scarfs) or Niqab (Face Cover).

Rights of refugees and migrants

Although the European Commission has allocated more than €13 million to Eritrea to support employment and develop skills in the country as a means of reducing migration, however, the waves of migration are increasing as a result of the worsening human rights situation. Sudan constituting a major transit area for Eritrean refugees. One of its courts made 104 refugees return to Eritrea, exposing them to numerous violations, and thousands of Eritreans fleeing are exposed to grave dangers 6 .

3 National report of the State of Eritrea, universal periodic revie
http://cutt.us/SWu1S
4 Classification of press freedom 2017, Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
https://rsf.org/ar/reports/2017-press-freedom-index-ever-darker-world-map
5 Annual report 2017, Amnesty International, op. cit.
6 Amnesty International report, op. cit.

Recommendations

• The need to operationalize international mechanisms for the protection of human rights, ensuring the sovereignty of Eritrea over its territory and the realization of the principle of good-neighborliness and non-interference in its affairs, which constitute an impediment to Eritrea's stability.

• Investigate the movements of certain external forces in the Horn of Africa and their relation to human rights violations.

• Approval of requests for country visits by UN special rapporteurs.

• International agencies, donor bodies and international funding trusts should provide the necessary assistance to Eritrea so that it can address the root causes of the worsening economic and social rights.

• Allow international organizations and their representatives to conduct further country visits to Eritrea and share with them all regard to its work, in order to provide a transparent legal image on the one hand and to provide appropriate assistance on the other.

• To give effect to the international instruments to which Eritrea is a signatory with regard to human rights and to ratify other international conventions that it has not yet ratified.

• Opening up civil space to politicians and jurists, releasing press freedom and not following journalists in critics of the government and to opened the way for the formation of community associations, allowing international organizations to carry out their work within the country, and the government to lift its hand from trade unions.
• Take serious steps to halt the exodus of Eritrean refugees to other States, with the need to coordinate with Yemen, Ethiopia, Sudan and Djibouti to regularize the situation of those refugees.

• Accelerate measures to reduce any famine or drought situation accepted by the country, while providing a suitable nutritional environment for children, women and the elderly. With the need for full coordination with relevant international organizations; "UNICEF, FAO, WHO".

• To promote freedom of religion and belief for all, as well as non-interference of the government in the affairs of religious institutions contrary to the freedom to practice religious rites.